

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 12234

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR VE

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH FORMER VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT
ROMULO BETANCOURT

1. I CALLED LAST NIGHT ON FORMER PRESIDENT ROMULO BETANCOURT FOR ONE OF OUR HABITUAL TOURS D'HORIZON. THIS FOLLOWED UPON A PLEASANT SERIES OF CONVERSATIONS LAST WEEKEND AT THE CELEBRATION OF AYACUCHO IN VENEZUELA'S TEMPORARY CAPITAL CUMANA.

2. BETANCOURT STARTED THE CONVERSATION BY DEPLORING THE TENDENCY HE HAD NOTICED IN RECENT MONTHS ON BOTH SIDES, THE UNITED STATES AND VENEZUELA, TO MAKE PUBLIC CHARGES WHICH SERVE TO ENVENOM OUR RELATIONSHIPS. HE SAID THIS HAD STARTED WITH PRESIDENT FORD'S SPEECH TO THE UNITED NATIONS LAST SEPTEMBER; BUT HE EQUALLY DEPLORED PRESIDENT PEREZ'S REJOINDER OF SEPTEMBER 19. BETANCOURT PARTICULARLY WAS UNHAPPY ABOUT SECRETARY OF TREASURY SIMON'S SPEECH OF NOVEMBER 18 ALTHOUGH HE FOUND SECRETARY KISSINGER'S REMARKS OF APPROXIMATELY THE SAME DATE CONSIDERABLY MORE PALATABLE. HE SAID VERY DECISIVELY THAT SILENCE SHOULD BE THE PRESENT RULE AND I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT HE HAS IMPARTED THIS OPINION TO PRESIDENT PEREZ.

3. I TOLD THE FORMER PRESIDENT THAT WE WELCOMED THE INITIATIVE OF
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MINISTER SCHACHT AT QUITO IN SUGGESTING TO ASSISTANT SECRETARY

ROGERS THAT A DIALOGUE BE INITIATED BETWEEN OUR TWO GOVERNMENTS COVERING POINTS OF MUTUAL INTEREST AND OF POSSIBLE DIVERGENCE OF INTEREST. I SAID THAT DR SCHACHT HAD INDICATED TO ME AT OUR LAST MEETING THAT HE WAS FOLLOWING THROUGH WITH THIS SUGGESTION IN A LETTER TO SECRETARY KISSINGER. I HOPED, THEREFORE, THAT A CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE COULD PRESENTLY BE INITIATED BETWEEN OUR TWO GOVERNMENTS.

4. ON THE QUESTION OF CUBA BETANCOURT TOOK THE SAME LINE AS THAT VOICED TO ME BY FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER FALCON BRICENO AS REPORTED CARACAS 12129. HOWEVER, LIKE FALCON HE SEEMED TO FEEL THAT THE DIE HAD BEEN CAST AND THAT PEREZ WOULD MORE SOON THAN LATER ANNOUNCE THE RECOGNITION OF THE CASTRO REGIME.

5. ON THE MUCH TALKED ABOUT ISSUE OF PETROLEUM PRICES AND THE COST OF RAW MATERIALS FROM THE LESSER DEVELOPED COUNTRIES WHICH FORMED THE THESIS OF POLICY PLANNING MINISTER RODRIGUEZ IN HIS SPEECH AT THE FLETCHER SCHOOL AS SUMMARIZED CARACAS 12231, THE FORMER PRESIDENT SAID HE WAS MUCH INTERESTED IN THE POSSIBILITY OF "INDEXING" OR TAYING THE PRICES OF RAW MATERIALS

FROM THE LDC'S TO THE PRICE OF PETROLEUM. THIS, AS THE DEPARTMENT KNOWS, HAS LONG BEEN A FAVORED HOBBY HORSE RIDDEN BY PEREZ GUERRERO, THE IMPORTANT MINISTER FOR INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC AFFAIRS DURING THE TIME WHEN HE WAS SECRETARY GENERAL OF UNCTAD. HOWEVER, THE FACT THAT BETANCOURT SEEMS TO FAVOR SUCH A FORMULA SUGGESTS TO US THAT IF HE AND PEREZ GUERRERO BOTH URGE IT ON PRESIDENT PEREZ IT MAY INDEED BECOME AN OFFICIAL POLICY LINE WITH THE VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT.

6. I GOT THE OVERALL IMPRESSION THAT UPON HIS RETURN FROM ALMOST A YEAR'S ABSENCE IN EUROPE THE FORMER PRESIDENT IS CONSIDERABLY DISAPPOINTED NOT ONLY AT WHAT HE FINDS AT HOME IN VENEZUELA BUT AT THE GENERAL DISARRAY THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. HE SAID HE HAD TRAVELD EXTENSIVELY THROUGH ITALY, GERMANY, FRANCE, AND THE SCANDINAVIAN COUNTRIES AND WAS NOT AT ALL HAPPY AT THE IMPRESSIONS HE RECEIVED. HE SEEMED TO HAVE A SIMILAR FEELING OF MISGIVING AT THE APPROACH WHICH THE PRESENT VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT IS MAKING TO INTERNATIONAL PROBLEMS AND TO MATTERS WITH CONCERN CLOSEST TO HOME. HE SPOKE WITH PARTICULAR VIGOR AT THE LACK OF CONFIDENTIAL

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PROGRESS IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR, EXPOSTULATING THAT IT WAS ABHORRENT THAT VENEZUELA, WITH ITS OWN POTENTIAL FOR PRODUCTION, WAS FORCED EVEN TO IMPORT CORN AND SUGAR.

7. OUR MEETING ENDED WITH THE FORMER PRESIDENT DEPARTING TO MEET CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ AT THE AIRPORT UPON HIS TRIUMPHANT RETURN FROM LIMA. I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT BETANCOURT CONTINUES TO BE AN ACTIVE FORCE FOR WISE COUNSEL AND RESTRAINT IN ADVISING

THE PRESIDENT.
MCCLINTOCK

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